



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
Washington DC 20420

August 2, 2019

In Reply Refer To: 001B  
**FOIA Request: 19-04487-F**

Jasper Craven  
MuckRock News  
DEPT MR 70074  
411A Highland Ave  
Somerville, MA 021442516  
[70074-25811373@requests.muckrock.com](mailto:70074-25811373@requests.muckrock.com); [jclarkcraven@gmail.com](mailto:jclarkcraven@gmail.com)

Dear Mr. Craven,

This is the Initial Agency Decision (IAD) from the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Dept. Veterans Affairs (OSVA) to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request dated and received February 27, 2019, and assigned FOIA tracking number **19-04487-F**. You requested:  
."All emails between Dr. Michael Fallon (Michael.fallon@va.gov), Gabrielle Saunders (Gabrielle.saunders@va.gov), Stephanie McGovern (Stephanie.mcgovern@va.gov), Jake Leinenkugel and all officials in VA leadership (<https://www.va.gov/opa/bios/>) concerning service dogs for PTSD between Jan. 1, 2017 and present day. Keywords include: "ptsd" "dog" "canine" "study" "results" "evidence" and "price." (Date Range for Record Search: From 1/1/2017 To 3/1/2019)

Other VA FOIA offices are processing your FOIA request for responsive records located within their FOIA Offices and will issue separate responses accordingly. These include: OGC (**19-04788-F**), VBA (**19-04789-F**), VHA (**19-04790-F**), NCA (**19-04791-F**), OCLA (**19-04792-F**), HRA (**19-04793-F**), OSP (**19-04795-F**), OPIA (**19-04796-F**), OAWP (**19-04797-F**), OIT (**19-04798-F**), OEI (**19-04799-F**), BVA (**19-04800-F**), OF (**19-04801-F**), OALC (**19-04902-F**), VEO (**19-04803-F**), and OIG (unknown).

**IAD & Reasonable Searches Dated 5/24/19 & 8/1/19**

On May 24, 2019, our search cut-off date, the OSVA FOIA Officer requested that the VA OIT office submit all responsive emails in its possession. On June 6, 2019, the VA OIT office submitted the responsive emails, with the OSVA to conduct secondary searches.

On August 1, 2019, the OSVA FOIA Officer searched through the email box of Jake Leinenkugel with the date timeframe of January 1, 2017, to May 24, 2019, our search cut-off date. The OSVA FOIA Officer searched for all emails with the following stemmed search terms: 1) PTSD, and 2) "service dog." This search yielded one thousand eighty-three (1083) pages of responsive emails and their attachments.

After reviewing the one thousand eighty-three (1083) pages, OSVA redacts some information with FOIA Exemption 6. FOIA Exemption 6 permits VA to withhold a document or information within a document if disclosure of the information, either by itself or in conjunction with other information available to either the public or the FOIA requester, would result in an unwarranted invasion of an individual's personal privacy without contributing significantly to the public's understanding of the activities of the federal government. Specifically, the information being withheld, as indicated on the enclosed documents, under FOIA Exemption 6, consists of names, identities, email addresses, phone numbers, cellular numbers, and facsimile numbers of federal employees and private citizens. However, we release the names and VA contact information of

VA Senior Executives. Federal employees and private citizens retain a significant privacy interest under certain circumstances, such as in instances where the release of their information could represent a threat to their well-being, harassment, or their ability to function within their sphere of employment. The federal employees and private citizens whose information is at issue have a substantial privacy interest in their personal information. In weighing the private versus the public interest, we find that there is no public interest in knowing the names, identities, email addresses, phone numbers, cellular numbers, and facsimile numbers of federal employees and private citizens. The coverage of FOIA Exemption 6 is absolute unless the FOIA requester can demonstrate a countervailing public interest in the requested information by demonstrating that the FOIA requester is in a position to provide the requested information to members of the general public and that the information requested contributes significantly to the public's understanding of the activities of the Federal government. Additionally, the requester must demonstrate how the public's need to understand the information significantly outweighs the privacy interest of the person to whom the information pertains. Upon consideration of the records, I have not been able to identify a countervailing public interest of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the privacy interest of the individuals whose names are redacted. The protected information has been redacted and (b)(6) inserted. "Withholding a telephone number or e-mail address, alone, is not sufficient to protect that [privacy] interest; alternate means of contacting and harassing these employees would be readily discoverable on the Internet if this court ordered their names disclosed." Long v. Immigration & Customs Enf't, 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 160719 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

#### **FOIA Mediation**

As part of the 2007 FOIA amendments, the Office of Government Information Services (OGIS) was created to offer mediation services to resolve disputes between FOIA requesters and Federal agencies as a non-exclusive alternative to litigation. Using OGIS services does not affect your right to pursue litigation. Under the provisions of the FOIA Improvement Act of 2016, the following contact information is provided to assist FOIA requesters in resolving disputes:

#### **VA Central Office FOIA Public Liaison:**

Name: John Buck

Email Address: [vacofoiaservice@va.gov](mailto:vacofoiaservice@va.gov)

#### **Office of Government Information Services (OGIS)**

Email Address: [ogis@nara.gov](mailto:ogis@nara.gov)

Fax: 202-741-5769

Mailing address:

National Archives and Records Administration

8601 Adelphi Road

College Park, MD 20740-6001

#### **FOIA Appeal**

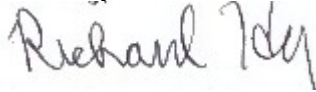
This concludes OSVA's Initial Agency Decision to request **19-04487-F**. Please be advised that should you desire to do so, you may appeal the determination made in this response to:

Office of General Counsel (024)  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420

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If you should choose to file an appeal, please include a copy of this letter with your written appeal and clearly indicate the basis for your disagreement with the determination set forth in this response. Please be advised that in accordance with VA's implementing FOIA regulations at 38 C.F.R. § 1.559, your appeal must be postmarked no later than ninety (90) days of the date of this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Richard Ha". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Richard Ha, JD, CIPP/G  
OSVA FOIA Officer

Attachment – redacted one thousand eighty-three (1,083) pages of emails